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PP RUEHWEB

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P 091659Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7932  
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 4011  
RUWDQAA/CCGDELEVEN ALAMEDA CA PRIORITY

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000868

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC AND INL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [CO](#) [CH](#) [CS](#)

SUBJECT: MORE CHINESE MIGRANTS RESCUED IN COSTA RICAN WATERS

REF: A. 06 SAN JOSE 2316

[1](#)B. SAN JOSE 132

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) On April 21, the Costa Rica Coast Guard (SNGC) again rescued a large number of Chinese migrants adrift in Costa Rican territorial waters. Three Ecuadorians and two Peruvians were also apprehended, and charged with human trafficking under Costa Rica's new immigration law. The governments of Costa Rica and Colombia have not yet reached an agreement on the costly repatriation of the migrants to China, with the GOCR blaming Colombia's temporary lifting of the visa requirement for Chinese travelers from January 1 to May 1 for the spike in Chinese migrants heading north. These rescues of Chinese migrants in Costa Rican waters put a great strain on an already stretched-thin SNGC. End Summary.

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CHINESE MIGRATION THROUGH CENTRAL AMERICA INCREASING  
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[1](#)2. (U) On April 20, SNGC officials were notified by two merchant vessels that the "Arluc," of Ecuadorian origin, was disabled and in danger of sinking approximately 110 miles off the southwest coast of Costa Rica. Over the next 24 hours, the merchant vessels took on 57 Chinese nationals, three Ecuadorians, and two Peruvians from the "Arluc." The young, mostly male Chinese migrants claimed they paid from USD 10,000 to USD 15,000 to be smuggled into the U.S. The migrants were transferred to a SNGC patrol boat and on April 23 arrived at Puntarenas on the Pacific coast where they were treated for dehydration.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Ecuadorians and Peruvians were later determined to be the vessel's crew, not immigrants, and were placed in preventative detention as human traffickers under the new Costa Rican immigration law that took effect in August 2006. As of May 3, 15 of the Chinese had been returned to Colombia, according to Minister of Public Security Fernando Berrocal, who credited his "personal friendship" with the Colombian Ambassador for the return of the immigrants. Otherwise, Berrocal told Poloffs, all the Chinese would still be languishing in the GOCR, immigration detention center. Earlier, because of the USD 5000/head cost to return the migrants to Hong Kong, Costa Rican Immigration officials had announced that they were seeking a compromise with the Colombian government to accept at least those migrants who still had a valid round trip ticket from Hong Kong to Bogota in their possession. (This may have been the group of 15 Berrocal mentioned.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) This was the second rescue of Chinese migrants by the SNGC in the last six months. In October 2006, 128 Chinese and Peruvian migrants were rescued near Costa Rica's Isla del Coco and returned to Peru (Ref A). These rescues strain the limited resources of the GOCR. In both cases, the SNGC was forced to divert one or more patrol boats outside of their normal range and fuel capacity to rescue the migrants and the Directorate of Immigration had to offload, process the immigrants, and attend to their health needs. According to the GOCR, the October 2006 rescue cost the GOCR over USD one million. Because Costa Rica's Pacific Coast territorial waters are greatly extended by possession of the Isla del Coco - hundreds of miles west of its Pacific coast, an increase in this migration route could seriously affect the SNGC's operations and budget. A slightly exasperated Berrocal made this point to Poloffs on May 3. Although relieved that the GOCR had re-established visa requirements for Chinese nationals as of May 1, Berrocal feared that any "in the pipeline" already could pose additional burdens on the GOCR's resources. To stress his point, he said that leaders of the large smuggling ring broken up by the GOCR in January (Ref B) had told authorities there were "over 10,000"

Chinese in Costa Rica illegally.

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COMMENT  
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15. (SBU) Berrocal,s concerns may be well-founded. According to the April 2007 report "Human Smuggling: Increase in Chinese Transiting Colombia" produced by the DHS Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center, an estimated 2000 Chinese left Hong Kong for Colombia in the first two months of this year alone. Presumably, many of these will try their luck on the maritime routes off Costa Rica, and some may again need assistance from the overstretched SNGC. Migrant rescue responsibilities are another reason continued USG assistance to the Costa Rican Coast Guard is essential.  
LANGDALE